



For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death.

Rachel Carson,
Silent Spring, 1962

Forum

Family Dollar Values

If Congress approves President Clinton's recent budget proposal, an estimated \$50 million dollars could be used to support worldwide family planning services, including abortion.

Upon appropriation of these funds the United States will renew its membership in the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. In 1985, the United States withdrew from the U.N. program to demonstrate the Reagan administration's opposition to abortion. The U.N. Fund for Population Activities does not support "coercive" family planning programs such as China's mandated abortion policy, and Clinton's proposal has made it clear that the United States will ensure that none of its funds are used to support such programs.

The shift in policy from the Reagan and Bush administrations is a signal that the United States will be more active in world population efforts. Population growth and the continued movement of people from rural to urban areas are believed to place enormous stress on the environment in many countries. The effects of population dynamics on the environment were not addressed at the Environmental Summit in Rio de Janeiro, in part out of reluctance to open the United States to criticism for withdrawing from the U.N. Fund for Population Activities.

The United Nations is planning an international conference on population and development to be held in Cairo in 1994. The United States is expected to be a strong and active presence at the meeting.

Radon Prevention Program Hits High Gear

The presence of radon in private homes and its potential for causing lung cancer is certainly not news, but aggressive local, state, and federal efforts to identify and remediate residences with elevated radon levels and to prevent radon contamination are.

The 1986 reauthorization of the Superfund program included an unrelated requirement that EPA initiate a radon research and demonstration program. In addition, EPA has launched a highly effective, state-based radon control program that provides public information, tests households, and gives remediation advice. This nationwide program involves a large number of private and voluntary organizations at the local level, most of which were recruited by state and local health officials.

EPA also helped draft the environmental health prevention objectives for radon exposure reduction in *Healthy People 2000*. One objective calls for the adoption of local construction standards in at least 35 states that minimize radon in new buildings where levels of naturally occurring radon are high. Another objective calls for at least 30 states to require disclosure of elevated levels of radon when buildings are offered for sale. Both objectives are to be met by the year 2000.

On 12 April 1993, EPA published a notice in the *Federal Register* announcing construction standards for preventing radon contamination in 150,000 new homes built each year in areas where geologic surveys have demonstrated high ambient levels of radon.

At the same time, EPA released information on radon in a guidebook targeted to home buyers and sellers. This guidebook has been endorsed by environmental and health officials and by realtors and local governments.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has published *Case Study in Environmental Medicine on Radon Toxicity*, designed to increase the knowledge of health professionals engaged in primary care about the hazards of radon and to aid in the evaluation of potentially exposed patients. The case study is the 14th in a series of 29 such documents released by the ATSDR.

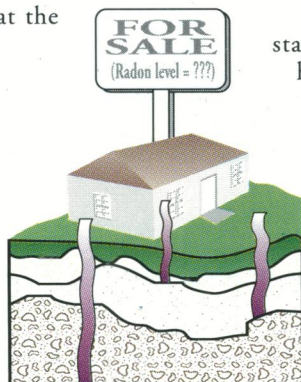
Frank Lautenberg (D-New Jersey) has introduced a bill to the Senate to reauthorize the 1988 Indoor Radon Abatement Act to assure that federal leadership in radon exposure reduction continues. Joseph Kennedy II (D-Massachusetts) introduced a companion bill in the House. Hearings on the Kennedy bill were held on 24 May 1993. Both proposals would continue current radon research and development and expand the radon prevention programs. The bills would make disclosure of radon levels when real estate is transferred a federal law. The bills would also extend requirements for radon testing and abatement to the workplace.

Results from new epidemiologic studies of radon and lung cancer in the general population are eagerly awaited. These studies should help determine accuracy of the current cancer risk assessment conducted by EPA. The estimate of 7,000 to 30,000 deaths annually from lung cancer is based in large part on studies of workers exposed occupationally to radon. Because these studies looked at miners who were exposed to dusts, fibers, and other possible lung carcinogens, some scientists suggest that the risk is overstated. Most of the current studies attempt to differentiate the contribution of radon alone to the risk of lung cancer from the risk of passive and/or direct exposure to cigarette smoke in residential settings. Whatever the new studies may find, efforts to reduce exposure to radon in homes throughout the United States have become an important part of fighting indoor air pollution.

Here Comes the Sun

Solar cells will almost certainly be a component of electric cars currently being developed by automakers, according to Anthony Catalano, a director at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colorado. "I think we can see the day when parking lots would be covered with solar cells, and you would plug in while you park," said Catalano.

Catalano was one of the more than 600 solar-energy experts that attended a Photovoltaic Specialists Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, this May. Conference par-



Unwanted houseguest. New EPA program targets radon.